



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 8**

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APR - 8 2008

Ref: EPR-N

Robert J. Thompson, District Ranger  
Mystic Ranger District  
Black Hills National Forest  
8221 South Highway 15  
Rapid City, South Dakota 57702

Re: Upper Spring Creek Area – Draft  
Environmental Impact Statement  
CEQ# 20080060

Dear Mr. Thompson:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 8 (EPA) has reviewed the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (DEIS) for the Upper Spring Creek (USC) Area on the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF). We offer the following comments in accordance with our responsibilities under Section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332(2)c, et. seq., and EPA's authority under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 7609.

The United States Forest Service (USFS) proposes to implement multiple resource management actions within the Upper Spring Creek project area. This project is guided by the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as amended by the Phase II Amendment; the statutory authority and direction provide by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act; and supported by the National Fire Plan; the 10-year comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan agreed to by the Western Governors' Association; and the President's Healthy Forest Initiative. The focus of the proposed project is to treat vegetation on a broad landscape scale to reduce the threat to ecosystem components, including forest resources, from existing insect and disease (Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB)) epidemic and reduce severe wildfire.

The project encompasses approximately 44,100 acres of which 39,700 acres are within the National Forest System and 4,300 acres are interspersed private lands. The project area is located west of Hill City and east of Deerfield Lake, Pennington County, South Dakota.



EPA supports the proposed project's stated purpose and need, which is to achieve desired land and resource conditions, reduce the threat to the ecosystem components, restore the forest to a healthy resilient fire-adapted ecosystem and protect adjacent communities from catastrophic wildfires.

The Forest Service identified three significant issues that influenced the development of alternatives in the DEIS: Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic, wildfire and fuel hazard, and vegetation and wildlife diversity. Using this as guidance, the DEIS presents three alternatives, including the no action alternative and two proposed action alternatives. Alternative B is the USFS's proposed action. This alternative proposes to commercially thin approximately 15,650 acres of forest and non-commercial thinning of approximately 11,750 acres of forest to open up forest stands by removing MPB infested trees and reduce stand density to lower MPB and wildfire hazard. Most forest thinning would use whole tree harvest methods. Scattered overstory removal is also planned. In addition approximately 14,200 acres of prescribed broad cast burning is proposed. Alternative C is similar to Alternative B except there will be no overstory removal or hardwood retention treatment in typed hardwood stands. This alternative was developed in response to public comments and opposition raised regarding overstory removal and hardwood retention treatment.

In general, the DEIS offers a thorough description of the project's impacts and how those impacts will be mitigated. Our primary concerns have to do with impacts to water quality from and a lack of specificity regarding impacts to wetlands.

EPA evaluates the potential effects of proposed actions and the adequacy of the information in the DEIS. We rate this DEIS an "EC-2" (environmental concerns, insufficient information) under EPA's enclosed ratings criteria. The EC rating indicates that the reviewer has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to adequately protect the environment. These are described in the attached comments. We also recommend additional analysis and information to fully assess and mitigate all potential impacts of the management actions.

EPA appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the DEIS and your willingness to consider our comments at this stage of your planning process. If you would like to discuss our comments, please feel free to contact Dick Clark of my staff at (303) 312-6748.

Sincerely,



Larry Svoboda  
Director, NEPA Program  
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation

enclosure





Detailed Comments  
Upper Spring Creek Project Area Draft EIS  
Black Hills National Forest  
Mystic Ranger District

Watershed, Geology and Soils

EPA would like to see the FEIS provide supporting referenced documents on some of the assumptions the USFS's is making in their discussion in section "Water Yield and Flow Regime", page 41. EPA does not disagree with the findings in this section, but does question how these assumptions are reached. Please reference supporting studies and reference material.

As stated in the "Stream Channel Stability and Floodplains" section, page 42 "The major stream stability concern within the USC project area is a segment of Spring Creek...." EPA believes it would be beneficial if the FEIS addresses this concern in detail for each of the proposed action alternatives. In our review of the DEIS, we found the corrective actions and prevention presented in the document to be overly general.

EPA's review of the "Surface Water Quality," section page 42 we have found it lacking in determining the linkage of the proposed action and its effect on existing water quality concerns within and downstream of the Spring Creek watershed. As stated in the DEIS, "Spring Creek, from its headwaters to Sheridan Lake, is listed as a Category 5 impaired stream segment...." Currently Sheridan Lake is listed as not meeting water quality standards for Coldwater Permanent Fish Life due to dissolved oxygen, PH, water temperature and high Trophic State Index. EPA would like to see the FEIS more fully evaluate the potential impacts of the USFS action on the Spring Creek watershed and Lake Sheridan. The information that is found in the Water Quality section, page 48, is very general with no clear description on how water quality will be protected by the proposed action alternatives. Additional information should be included in the FEIS regarding the corrective actions being planned to restore the water quality of these water bodies, and a detailed list of best management practices that will be implemented. EPA is unclear if the USFS is going to undertake water quality monitoring. This should be clearly explained in the FEIS.

In our review of the Wetland, Riparian Areas, and Groundwater-Dependent Ecosystem" section, page 43, note that the USFS has not identified any of the wetlands as being jurisdictional under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA). EPA believes it would be beneficial to have this confirmed prior to the FEIS. In addition, there is no reference to Executive Order (EO) 11990, which directs federal agencies and especially federal land management agencies to provide leadership and take action to minimize the destruction, loss or degradation of wetlands, and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. EPA requests that the FEIS provide discussion on how EO 11990 applies to the proposed action on the forest and how USFS will comply with this EO.

